

HR Weekly Podcast

06/20/2007

Today is June 20, 2007, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources. This week's topic is the Healthcare Employees Recruitment & Retention Program.

At the June Budget & Control Board meeting, Healthcare Employees Recruitment & Retention Pilot Program was extended for an additional year. This program, which was initially implemented in June 2004, allowed seven healthcare agencies- Department of Corrections, Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Mental Health, and Department of Vocational Rehabilitation- greater flexibility in recruiting and retaining critical healthcare employees.

Employment statistics on healthcare workers in the United States indicate immense challenges that public healthcare agencies face in recruiting and retaining these valuable workers. These challenges are due to the high percentage of healthcare employees who are currently eligible to retire; chronic national labor shortages in the healthcare field; and high turnover rates among public healthcare workers. In addition, the national nursing shortage has caused employers, particularly SC state healthcare agencies, to adopt creative human resources techniques in attracting and retaining nurses. The Healthcare Pilot Program addresses some of these human resources challenges by allowing the seven agencies mentioned earlier, to use compensation and educational initiatives in recruiting and retaining healthcare workers in critical needs areas. These initiatives apply to employees occupying full time equivalent positions in certain healthcare state classifications. The Office of Human Resources defines critical needs areas as jobs located in SC's rural areas, areas with high turnover, or areas where the agency has experienced recruiting difficulties.

Under the Program's compensation initiatives, agencies can offer their employees sign-on, referral, or retention bonuses. Agencies can grant a sign-on bonus of up to \$3,000 to healthcare recruits at the beginning of their employment. A referral bonus of \$2,000 can be granted to agency employees for referring a successful candidate for a hard-to-fill or critical needs position. Also, an agency may give a current employee who has a bona fide job offer with another employer, within or outside state government, a bonus of up to \$ 5,000 as an incentive to retain the employee. Bonuses awarded to an employee cannot exceed \$ 10,000 in a year.

The Program's educational initiatives allow healthcare agencies to provide their employees paid leave for classes, paid practicum, loan repayment, or tuition assistance. An agency can provide educational leave for employees in full-time equivalent positions to attend class while they are enrolled in a healthcare degree program that is related to the agency's mission. In addition, healthcare agencies can allow employees to be paid while working on a practicum or required clinical experience towards the completion of their healthcare degree. State agencies can enter into an agreement with newly hired Psychiatrist and Nurses to repay them for their outstanding student loans associated with the healthcare degree. Finally, the healthcare pilot program extends the State Budget and Control Board's Tuition Assistance Guidelines so that agencies can reimburse their employees up to 10 credit hours per semester; allow probationary employees to participate in tuition assistance programs; and provide tuition pre-payment instead of tuition reimbursement for employees pursuing a healthcare degree. The remaining tuition could be reimbursed to the employee after successfully completing the class. All other requirements in the State Budget and Control Board's Tuition Assistance Guidelines will apply.

We hope that healthcare agencies can use the Healthcare Pilot Program's Initiatives in building a stronger workforce for their agencies so that these agencies can better meet the needs of their clients and the citizens of South Carolina.

Specific information such as the list of healthcare state classification titles, healthcare degree programs, and tuition assistance guidelines can be found on the Office of Human Resource's website at www.ohr.sc.gov.

If you need additional information, please call your HR consultant at 737-0900.